

Radio Days – 2014-05-17

Tip of the Week – When Your ISP Dies II

Last week I mentioned how my ISP had just up and gone into receivership on the afternoon of Friday 2 May. I did not discover that I had lost my means of contact with the outside world until I tried to upload my cheat sheet for Saturday 3 May. It was at that time that I started to realise just how much I had lost in this calamity.

This was an unfortunate occurrence and left me with major internet and email withdrawal symptoms. If you have ever lost access to your drug of choice (legal or illegal) you will have some idea of how bereft I was feeling. It was not until a friend suggested that I use my phone as a means of connecting to the internet that I got some semblance of order back into my life.

As an aside: this helped me realise just how much easier it is to solve other people's problems than it is to solve your own problems. Somehow, being further removed from the problem, the lack of emotional involvement means that problems which are overwhelming for those actively caught up in them are often trivial to solve when they are at arm's length for the consultant.

The Effect

If you are one of those who was caught up in the collapse of either TADAust or ONESeniors now is the time to change your ISP if you have not done so already. This will mean a change of email address (if your email address is tied to your ISP) but at least you will have an email address even if you need to let all your contacts know your new email address.

In my case, because I had both my internet access and my landline phone with ONESeniors, I had to reconnect both phone and internet. In my case it took about a week to reconnect my phone line and about a further day to reconnect my internet.

If you are one of those affected by ONESeniors or TADAust going into receivership then, if you have not done so already, you will need to connect to another ISP (and, perhaps, another telephone company) so that you can have your telephone and internet back to where they belong.

I was lucky because I have an email address which is not attached to ONESeniors so I was able to receive (using my mobile phone to connect to the internet) emails (but not send them) and surf the web. This gave me some relief from my internet withdrawal symptoms.

What Should You Do?

Your only option is to find another ISP (and, perhaps, another telephone company) to take the place of the one that you have lost. Yes, I am aware that it may well be difficult for you to do this, but if you want to continue using your phone and internet (and any other services that you rely on) you will need to make the effort.

You may well need help. There are many source of help ranging from family and friends to neighbours and organisation like internet cafes and rural transaction centres. The staff at these places can help you find the right internet plan using a website like Whirlpool.

In the end, you are the person most affected so it should be your decision as to what you do.

Old Computers Do Die

During the week I had to help a client make the decision to put her old computer out of its misery. This was a difficult decision, but one which needed to be made. The computer in question used Windows XP. As I hope you are aware, Windows XP has come to the stage where Microsoft is no longer prepared to support it. This means that, in time, other companies would stop supporting products running on Windows XP.

Why Are Computers Slow?

There are a number reasons why a computer could be slow. These include:

- Inadequate hardware
- Too many programs start when you turn your computer on
- Problems with your hard disc.

There are, of course, many other reasons why a computer could be slow but I managed to find the problem in this computer in the first three tests that I did so there was no need to look any further.

Looking for a problem when you have already found it is just a waste of time!

Checking The Hardware

The first thing, when solving this problem, is to check the hardware to see if it is adequate. Far too many Windows XP computers are under-powered: many people bought on price so the manufacturers made some of their computers slower to reduce the price.

The two main places where manufacturers cut price were in the power of the processor and in the amount of RAM. RAM is needed when the computer is running so that you can see what is running by looking at your screen. The processor is needed to move things on your screen and to read and write your hard disc, as well as printing and accessing the internet.

This computer had only a small amount of RAM (383 MB). This amount, even though small, is not enough to account for the slowness of the computer. I have seen some Windows XP computers with 128 MB RAM and this results in a really slow computer so, by this standard, my client's computer was adequate.

Checking The Programs

I used one of my favourite programs, CCleaner, to check for the programs which start when the computer starts. There were some programs which started when her computer started and which did slow her computer down but, again, these few programs were not enough to account for the extreme slowness of this computer.

CCleaner has some very useful tools available. These tools are found, naturally enough, in the **Tools** section. The one that I used to check for programs which start when your computer is started is called **Startup**. Removing the wrong items from this section can mean that your computer will not start next time that you switch it on, so should be used with caution.

Despite this warning, it remains a useful tool because, when you know what you are doing, you can speed your computer up by an unexpected amount.

In my client's computer this did not happen so on with the next step.

Checking The Hard Disc

One of the reasons that computers slow down is because the hard disc can become corrupted. This can be caused by at least two events:

- A power fluctuation just when Windows is writing to your hard disc
- Old age causing the magnetic surface of your hard disc to disintegrate

This is easy to check using another of my favourite programs: Defraggler. Defraggler has a menu option **Action » Advanced » Check Drive for Errors**. This runs a small Windows utility which checks your hard disc for errors. There are three phases with the first one being comparatively quick and the second one both taking the most time and being the one where most errors occur.

My client's computer found an error in this check so offered to attempt a repair at the next reboot of the computer. I accepted this offer, rebooted then ran the Defraggler check again. The error was still there so it is probable that this error cannot be fixed without costing more than a new computer.

The problem with fixing such an old computer is, of course, that another problem is very likely to surface and cost even more to fix. Much better to bite the bullet and get a new computer with the latest version of everything.

That is what we did.

Further Information

Whirlpool	www.whirlpool.net.au
CCleaner	www.piriform.com
Defraggler	www.piriform.com